Otto Sonneid
Papers

"Optical Self Observation and
a New Pictorial Concept"
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OPTICAL SELF OBSERVATION and a NEW PICTORIAL CONCEPT

When looking you see a section of the outer world, but this is not the entire result of the real ƥ optical process. You perceive, though you don't apperceive, the whole front of your acephalous body, both sides of your nose, a part of your eyebrows. We don't note these visible parts of ourselves, we overlook these elements that always accompany or quasi frame everything we view. Artists didn't paint this always present Self, neither those of the immense past nor these of our days who are so anxious to invent new, or at least different, ways of vision. The very fact of this non-appearance in art reflects clearly enough the habit of mankind to disregard it.

Philosophical thought, however, overcame this habit, reaching deep knowledge of the Self and its role in our psychological functions. The principal tendencies and achievements of philosophy have their artistic correspondences, as realism, idealism, materialism. Scientific discoveries too, as those of the Spectrum or the Unconscious, influenced art widely. Thus modern knowledge of the Self would have justified long ago a more or less adequate artistic correlate.

Although artists tell about themselves not less than poets and depict themselves often enough, they do it always indirectly. For the mirror is only a substitute of another person who would lend his eyes to the self-portraying artist. Even when we omit this substitute we use a way of seeing we learned from it. The self portraits existing so far are a way of seeing the Self from outside. Therefore including the visible Self in artistic seeing and forming seems to be a necessary correction of our purely optical function, additionally motivated by the need pictorially to complete the psychological part of the seeing process.

3 years ago I painted my face as reflected in my own sun glasses. It looks abstract, but it is extremely realistic. The two ellipses became one; the forms

and even the colors are odd, but faithful to their objective appearance.

Now I had to come back to that abandoned position, but without glasses or any devices of indirect seeing. I tried to obtain documentary evidence of my real seeing by doing 2 drawings and 1 painting: In them the bow coming from the haired ridge above and turning far-off to the left and diagonally down to the right is my right eye-brow and the right side of my nose, and vice versa. In the drawings I finished the two bows separately; in the painting I improved that observation and noted their intersecting at their lower ends. In the painting you see me below sitting (not lying), quasi headless, and the parts of my head visible as mentioned, constitute so to speak the framework of the main surface that is a view of the street seen from my studio. My right paints it. This means that it represents the picture of the street, not the street itself.

The technical and aesthetical qualities of those drawings and this painting are certainly not the point. At any case I am aware of two weaknesses of this debut: a) Subject and object are here not in a meaningful and absolutely necessary correlation, since the object could be replaced by another. b) Though my elder son called the painting mysterious, and the younger scary, it is relatively inexpressive, the dialectic dualism of the two elements being the very content.

I foresee, however, a lot of factors of development. After the first painting of this kind I did a composition that means a further step on this way. Here Content returns, and intercorrelation between the different elements is restored. In addition to its original function, the "framework" gets in this painting # 2 that of a very personally conceived landscape. After finishing it I reached a new correction of the records of the optical facts : Now I observed

that only by some degree of of squinting sidewards, the eye-brows and both sides of the nose constitute bows as represented before. When looking exclusively forward the lower, the intersecting parts of the nose are clearly visible, as an approximately isosceles triangle. I noted it in the drawing # 3.

My latest step is painting # 3, "Landscape with Dead Bird"; it is my second picture on this theme. Here the "framework" becomes a more organic part of the composition. And looking from left and diagonally downwards reduced the appearance of the face to that of the left side of the nose.

My next endeavors will be dedicated to the search for monumentality based on the depiction of the described phenomenon.

P. S.

Otto Schneid

I nevertheless felt that I had still to continue research work; to coordinate direct and indirect seeing, resp. to confront with each other and to obtain their congruence. Or, I had both ways to reflect the same object, to get by both approaches one image. I did it in painting #4, "Double Self Portrait". Here my spectacles, resp. their frame, are the striking element, as striking as they are within the field of optical perception itself. Slightly looking to the left has the effect of drawing both lenses together: Of the right lens more than its left half, as well as more than the right half of the bridge are in sight, while of the left lens appears only its extremely left part. Beyond the glasses, and partly through the translucent frame, a part of the nose is seen in its right profile. The object visible through the glasses is what a mirror reflects, i.e. myself, wearing the same spectacles. The arm seen in the mirror image at the right is the right one; it is slightly lifted up, its hand to be completed while painting. Thus the division into direct and indirect seeing is quasi annulled. The congruity resulting allows to identify each point of the direct vision with the corresponding point of the indirect one, and vice versa.

O. S.

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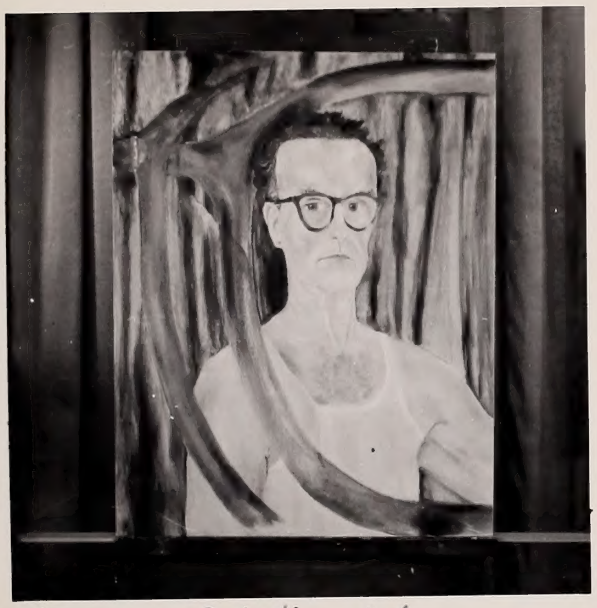
DRAWING „No. 2"

AUG 1962



Otto Schneid Painting # 4

AUG 1962

Otto Schneid Ptg. # 2

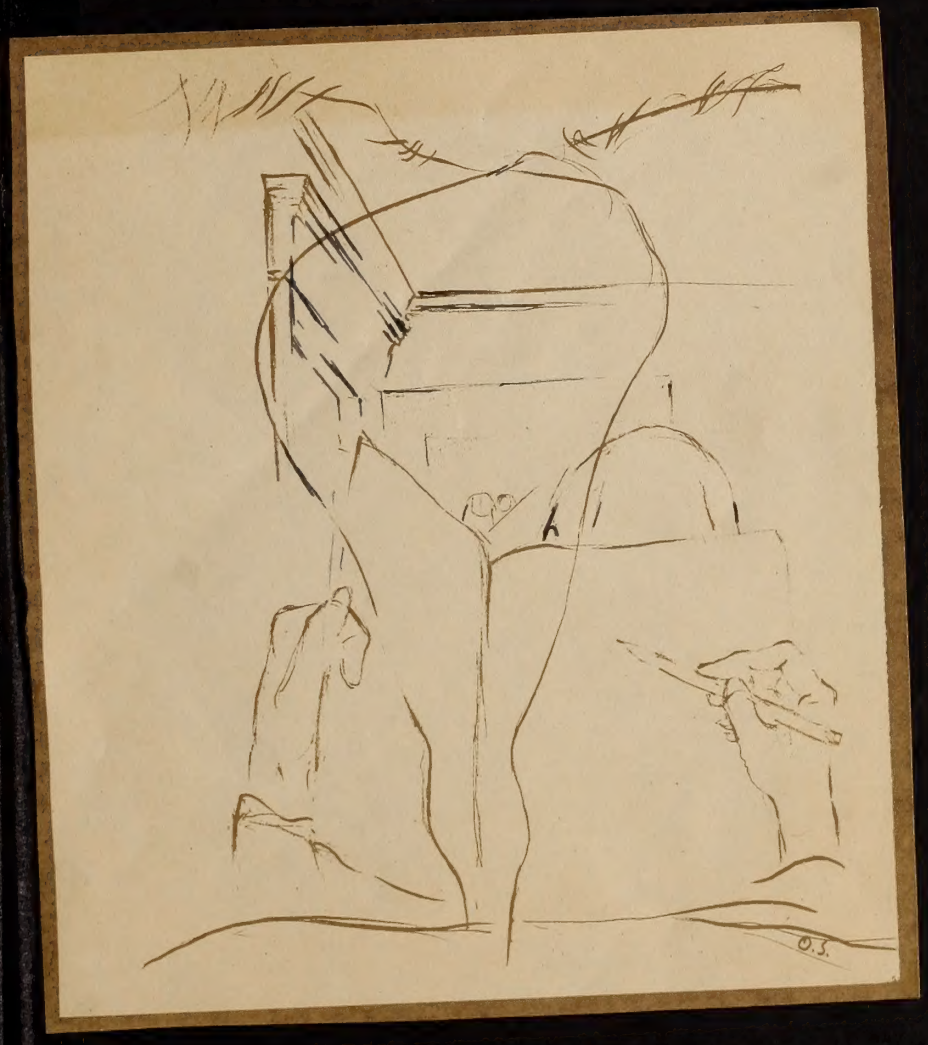
Otto Schneid Optical Self Portrait 1959

AUG 1962

Otto Schneid "Painting No. 3"

Otto Schneid "Painting No. 1"

Otto Schneid Drawing „NO. 3"



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